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HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

November 2009

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The November luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, November 19, 2009, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Kay Gough of Bay Books who will present and discuss great gift books for the Christmas season. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call *by noon on Wednesday, November 18*, to make your reservation, to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-five people, and to apprise us of the number for whom to prepare. The price of the lunch is \$8.00.

The main order of business at this meeting is the election of board members to serve from January 2010 through December 2012. If you would like to serve or to recommend someone, please call 467-4090 or nominate from the floor at the November meeting. The offices being filled this year are president, first vice-president, second vice-president, publicity chairman, and historian. A special "thank you" to those who have served on the board during these past two years.



Century Hall at 112 South Second Street
Bay St. Louis, MS

Historic Bay St. Louis Building Celebrates 100th Birthday

By
Vickie Niolet

An impressive structure sits at the foot of Court Street on South Second Street. Its balcony overlooks the Hancock County Courthouse, and further down, the Bay of Saint Louis. A wealth of factual history and fictional ghost stories surround the multi-level monument located next to Cedar

Rest Cemetery.

The large green building at 112 South Second Street is one of the oldest surviving structures in Old Town Bay St. Louis. It was originally constructed circa 1909 as a lodge and meeting hall for the Woodmen of the World and has served many purposes over its long history. Renamed "Century Hall" in honor of its one hundred year milestone, it now serves as a newly restored center for antiques, art, and other retail activity.

The Woodmen of the World (WOW) began in 1890 in Omaha, Nebraska, as a benevolent fraternal organization to provide financial assistance and burial benefits to its



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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Eddie Coleman, Editor
Linda-Lou Nelson, PublisherPublished monthly by the
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HOURS**

MONDAY — FRIDAY

10:00AM — 3:00PM

Closed: 12:00—1:00 (lunch)

MISSION STATEMENT

"TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION."

members. (The chapter associated with Bay St. Louis is Cedar Grove Camp, #517.) In addition to other benefits in the early days of the organization, each member received a distinctive headstone upon his death.

Several examples of the unique markers can be found in Cedar Rest cemetery, which borders the south side of the WOW building on Second Street. Often shaped as tree stumps, logs, axes, or a combination of all, they designate the graves of members in cemeteries all across the country. This original benefit of the organization eventually became too costly and was dropped in the 1920's, but the corporation remains in existence today as a large insurance provider, still headquartered in Omaha.

In addition to housing the WOW society, the top floor was used as a grand ballroom for various occasions. Theatrical performances and pageants delighted Sunday afternoon patrons before they left the slow pace of the Bay to return to the city (New Orleans). Graduations and banquets were hosted under the twenty-foot ceiling. Photographs of these early events show the stud walls and the open windows and doors. Later decorative pressed tin ceiling and wall tiles covered the inside of the massive top floor.

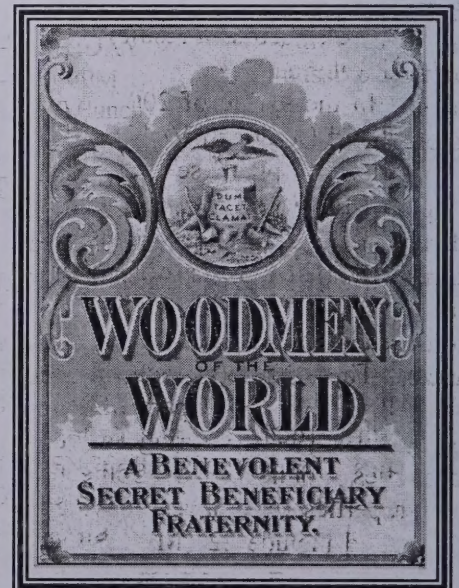
"The hall spacious and new was the scene of every public function. It was a financial success from the start and served as the town hall for theatrical, dance, and meeting purposes. A handsome revenue was derived therefrom" (Excerpt from *Louisiana's Loss, Mississippi's Gain* by Robert G. Scharff).

The building also hosted sporting events such as boxing matches, and at different times was the home to Coast Electric Power

Company, *The Sea Coast Echo*, and dance studios for several teachers, including Mrs. Dot Russell. Once it even provided an evening's respite for a researcher studying the possibility of resident ghosts. Although no apparitions were officially documented, mysterious noises were reported on the top floor.

In the early 1980's, Donald and Dorothy Brown remodeled the interior to make four levels of antique galleries and retail space. The new arrangement could house five shops on the first level, four larger shops on the second (ground) level, and five more shops on the third level. All of this was in addition to the thirty-six hundred square feet of space on the top (ballroom or fourth) level. It was an innovative structural design that increased the floor plan and left exterior windows and open spaces between the first and third levels to prevent dark claustrophobic areas.

The Browns named the building "The Antique Arcade" and marketed everything from fine antiques and gifts to bubblegum and candy. Mr. Brown, a retired Merchant Marine, had a section of nautical objects while Mrs. Brown collected books, glass, and furniture from England and Europe. On the





This photograph, dated 1/8/1911, was taken at one of the many social functions held in the ballroom of the Woodmen of the World Hall (now Century Hall).

—the Mallard Collection, HCHS

ground floor near the entrance were two shops especially popular with the local young people, a candy shop and an ice cream parlor. Upstairs, the phantoms and ghosts shared the ballroom with booths full of curiosities in a large flea market setting.

In 1994, a fire on the ballroom level damaged its wooden floor, and the water used to extinguish it permeated walls and merchandise downstairs, but the basic structure remained intact. However, the harm to the business was more serious. The upstairs flea market sporadically opened between 1994 and 2005, but the bottom three floors were closed as a result of the fire and water damage.

In the spring of 2005, Ann Tidwell and Doug and Vicki Niolet made plans to purchase the building. The Browns were inclined to sell the property to them because of their intention to preserve the character of the building and maintain a retail establishment at the site.

The Niolets and Mrs. Tidwell have been a part of Old Town since 1994, restoring various properties around town. Some of the properties they have renovated or adapted include 220 Main Street

(Scharff's Grocery/Paper Moon, now Clay Creations), The Lumberyard Center (formerly a McDonald's lumber storage shed), 111 Main Street (the old Magnolia State Lumber and Supply Company, owner Dot Phillips), 200 North Beach Boulevard, and The Bay Town Inn.

After several months of negotiations, the Niolets, Mrs. Tidwell, and the Browns came to an agreement, and the deal was closed in mid-August, ten days before Hurricane Katrina.

After the storm, when Doug came to inspect the building, he fully expected to find water in the lowest level. But to his surprise and relief, the building had not flooded. The roof was blown away with most of the tin gone and some critical roof timbers also missing. The majority of the windows were blown out, and there was some damage to the interior from rain and wind, but for the most part, the building had survived Katrina.

Although structurally sound, but because of the loss of the roof, the exterior walls had splayed outward and needed to be realigned before the structure could be reconstructed. Another problem complicating timely restoration

was the considerable cache of bric-a-brac, antique furniture, and merchandise, mostly ruined by the rainwater, but still occupying all four levels of the interior.

Three long years of renovation included complete replacement of electrical and plumbing, extensive cosmetic repairs, and an upgrade to commercial codes and ADA compliance. Century Hall reopened in October 2008 during a statewide Mississippi Main Street event hosted by Old Town Merchants. Representatives from around the state were impressed by the remarkable efforts of rebuilding throughout Bay St. Louis, but they were specifically amazed at the transformation of Century Hall.

Former dance pupils, past employees, and old customers visit the building today and recall the various past lives of the building. Visitors often recount their own stories and recollections when they see the original beams and wooden floors still in place. Adults who remember the candy store and ice cream shop when they were kids now bring in their own children.

In 2009, The Bay St. Louis Historic Preservation Commission recognized Century Hall and its owners for their efforts to revitalize the building. They were acknowledged for the restoration of an historic structure and selected as a nominee for the People's Choice Award. Century Hall was also included in the new Walking Tour Map, which highlights historic and noteworthy sites in Old Town Bay St. Louis.

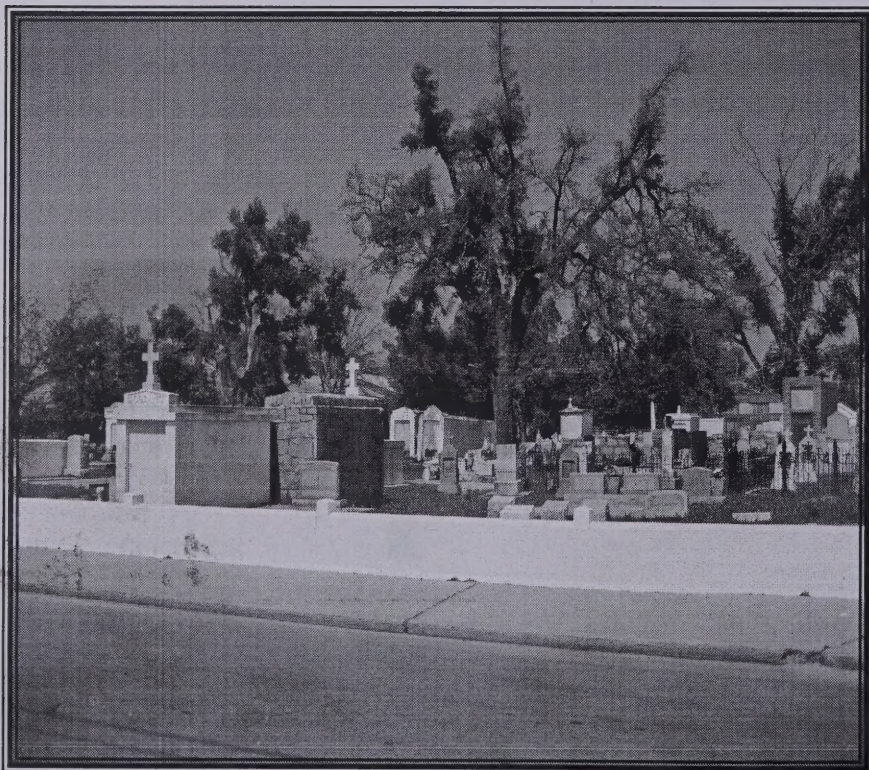
The upstairs ballroom remains full of opportunity. While it houses a jumble of items to be repaired, a makeshift workshop, and assorted storage, it still holds the promise of a grand future. The owners are hoping for an appropriate utilization of the upper level



Woodmen of the World, Cedar Grove Camp #517
—the Jermyn Collection HCHS

space with its balconies that overlook downtown. Currently they are looking for the best use of such a remarkable building, something that will benefit Old Town Bay St. Louis and respect the historical significance of the “Grande Dame” of Second Street.

On November 20, 2009, Century Hall will officially celebrate its Grand Opening and 100th Birthday. Everyone is invited to come and see the mingling of old and new. While preserving the past, Ann, Doug, and Vicki are looking toward the future and all



Cedar Rest Cemetery, Second Street, Bay St. Louis

the promise that this great building holds.

CEMETERY TOUR

By
Eddie Coleman

The Sixteenth Annual Cemetery Tour sponsored by the Hancock County Historical Society was held at Cedar Rest Cemetery on October 31, 2008. With the help of many volunteers and the dedication of many fine actors, this year's tour was a grand success. Guests were greeted at the cemetery by Scott Bagley, president of the Society.



Patt Cucullu as Kate Lobrano

Tour guides led visitors through the cemetery stopping along the way for actors portraying persons buried there to tell highlights of the citizens' lives.

The apparition of **Kate Lobrano** was the first character to greet guests. She owned the house which is now the home of the Hancock County Historical Society and with her husband maintained residences in Pointe a la Hache, LA, and Bay Saint Louis.

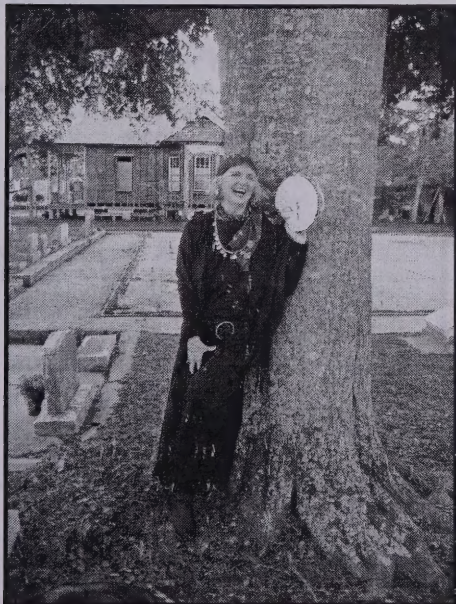
The ethereal appearance of **Annie Richtner Adam Graham** explained how she arrived in Bay St.



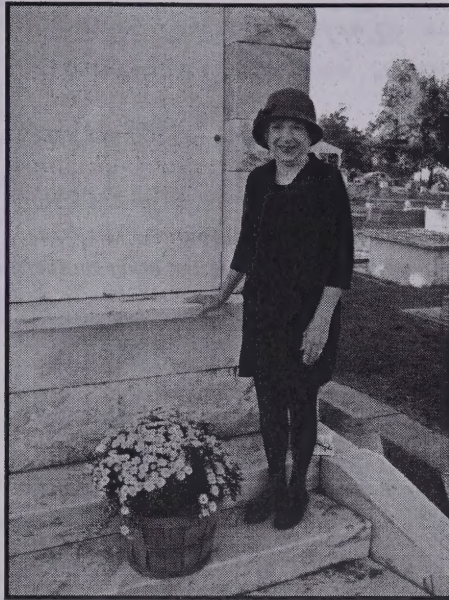
Barbara Seawright as Annie Richtner
Adam Graham

Louis as a toddler aboard one of the orphan trains carrying children from New York City to new homes throughout the South and West. When she began school, she spoke only French; luckily, her teacher taught in this language.

Emerging in the southern part of the cemetery, the spirit of **Ginger Burke Paradise** was the next to appear. Following gypsy tradition, the exact location of her grave is un-



Sandra Bagley as Ginger Burke Paradise

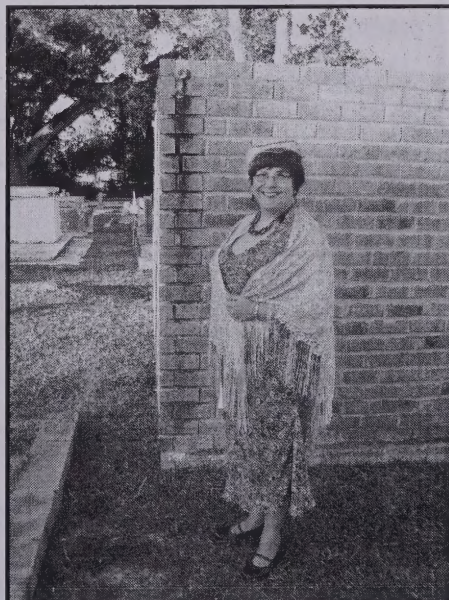


Gretchen Thorp as
Reine Helluy de Montluzin

known, so we never know where in the cemetery she'll materialize.

Moving toward the back of the cemetery, guests were introduced to the spiritual presence of **Reine Helluy de Montluzin**. A native of France, she and two of her children emigrated to America in 1856 to join her husband Ludovic and their eldest child, ultimately making their home in Bay St. Louis.

The incorporeal being of **Anita Taconi** was the next to appear. She raised flowers and sold preserves



Katy Gift as Anita Taconi

made with fruit from her orchard. She and her husband, Charles, lost their grocery store after his disabling accident in their sully.



Ava Sevin as Corine Carco

The phantasm of **Corine Carco** became visible near her grave. Having lived a colorful life herself, she didn't refrain from telling picturesque stories of her family.

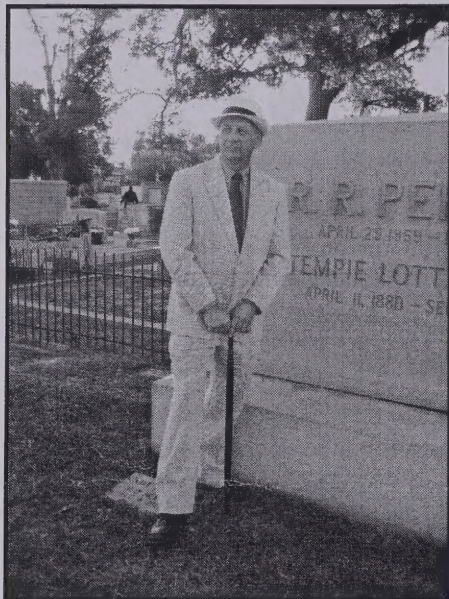
Moving toward the front of the cemetery, visitors were greeted by the spiritual presence of **Louis Joseph Piernas**. The son of "free per-



Al Showers as Louis Joseph Piernas

sons of color" who had emigrated from the West Indies in the early 1830's, he was the longest-serving postmaster of Bay St. Louis.

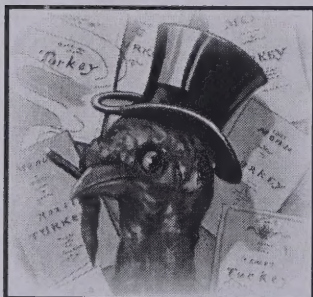
Bringing the tour to an end, the spiritual form of **R. R. Perkins** recounted events of his life in Bay St. Louis. He was the president and manager of Imperial Naval Stores and president of Merchants Bank. His



Ron Thorp as R. R. Perkins

spirit always points out that his headstone is the largest in the cemetery.

As the last of the visitors left the cemetery and the last of the candles were extinguished, the spirits of those past citizens who had appeared returned to their graves to rest until their next embodiment on All Hallows' Eve.



MINT JULEP MEMORIES *Strolling through History with Charles Gray*

Special ticketed event—\$100 per person

Please join us for this special guided historical walking and biking tour and reception to follow with mint juleps and other southern delights.

*Saturday, November 14, 2009
Hancock County Historical Society
3:00—6:00 P. M.*

*For tickets, contact Sheri Bevis,
Hancock Main Street Manager, at
228-216-9045.*

Historic Walking & Biking Tour

**Saturday, November 14th
9:00-11:00am**

Walk or ride through downtown while learning about some of our amazing history here in the Bay.

Registration starting at 8:30am between
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Donation - \$5 per person to support the work of the
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An intriguing anthology of tales of a tomcat living in a beach house on the Gulf Coast

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A collection of recipes by Bayou Tours

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A book of art, photography, and reminiscence of the Gulf Coast

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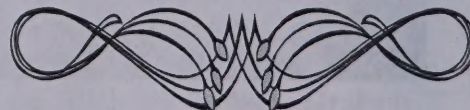
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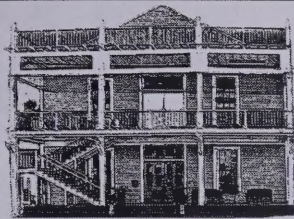
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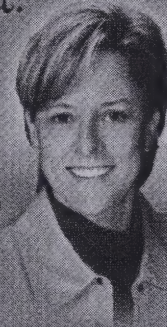
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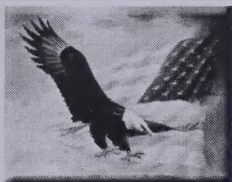
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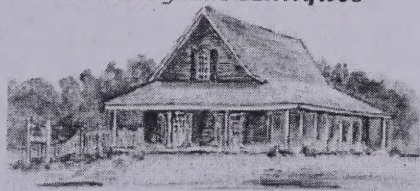
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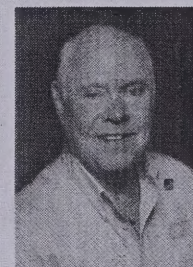
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